UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1991/NGO/37
13 February 1991

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Forty-seventh session
Agenda item 7

QUESTION OF THE REALIZATION IN ALL COUNTRIES OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS CONTAINED IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND IN THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, AND STUDY OF SPECIAL PROBLEMS WHICH THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FACE IN THEIR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE THESE HUMAN RIGHTS

Written statement submitted by the International Council of Women, the World Federation of Trade Unions and Zonta International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status (category I); Caritas Internationalis, Conference of European Churches, International Abolitionist Federation, International Association of Juvenile and Family Court Magistrates, International Association of Workers for Troubled Children and Youth, International Centre of Sociological, Penal and Penitentiary Research and Studies, International Commission of Jurists, International Council of Jewish Women, International Federation of Social Workers, International Federation of Women Lawyers, International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, International Federation-Terre des Hommes, International Fellowship of Reconciliation, International Movement ATD Fourth World, International Movement for Fraternal Union Among Races and Peoples, International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Medical Women's International Association, Pax Christi International, Pax Romana, the Salvation Army, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, World Federation of Methodist Women, World Movement of Mothers and World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations, non-governmental organizations in consultative status (category II); World Federation of Public Health Associations, a non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following communication which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[13 February 1991]

"The poor are the creators, the very source of all mankind's ideals,
Since it is through injustice that mankind discovered justice,
Through hatred, love,
Through tyranny, equality for all men."

Father Joseph Wresinski

JOINT DECLARATION

by the NGO Fourth World committee to the United Nations at its meeting held on 31 January 1991 at the Palais des Nations,

Human rights and extreme poverty

1. The Commission on Human Rights, by its resolution 1989/10, Human rights and extreme poverty, recognized the urgent need to acquire a true understanding of extreme poverty and its effects on the exercise of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. By its resolution 1990/15, it requested the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities "to examine the question of extreme poverty and exclusion from society in greater depth and to carry out a specific study of this question."

2. The sponsors of that resolution, adopted by consensus, stated that, in their view, the requested study should be undertaken as a matter of priority with the participation of the people affected, in co-operation with the NGOs close to them, in order that the voice of the poorest might be heard and that the way in which the issue of the full enjoyment of human rights arose in regard to them might be approached in a specific manner, and as far as possible from within.

3. By its decision 1990/119, the Sub-Commission appointed an expert to prepare the method and plan of work for the study.

4. These resolutions are a response to the request first presented by Father Wresinski to the Commission in 1987 (E/CN.4/1987/SR.29, paras. 62-67), and regularly maintained and recalled by the NGO-Fourth World committee.

Present goal: the actual participation of the poorest in the study on human rights and extreme poverty

5. The undersigned NGOs believe that, at the current stage of work on the study on human rights and extreme poverty, the crucial issue lies in the will to ensure the participation of the poorest sectors themselves in developing this understanding of extreme poverty and its influence on human rights. This participatory approach can be effected through consultation with the poorest sectors themselves and with those working with them, at all stages of the study, from its conception onwards.

6. Indeed, a study on the human rights of the poorest which did not involve their genuine participation would in itself be a violation of human rights. It would become one more report in which the poorest were discussed without themselves being afforded an opportunity to contradict and correct what was said about them by the representatives of a world from which they had been cut off for generations. Much more than that, the international community would

be deprived of an essential input which only the poorest can provide and which the defenders of human rights need in order for their efforts to bear fruit.

Raising a new awareness of extreme poverty based on real life

7. Extreme poverty and the precarious conditions which give rise to it are little or badly understood. Likewise poorly appreciated are the mechanisms which condemn the poorest sectors to their condition generation after generation. The shortcomings of the statistical data most commonly used nowadays to identify poverty in a country or region are that they focus chiefly on economic facts, and perhaps on some health and cultural aspects; they reveal nothing about the life, thinking and aspirations of those who have been overwhelmed by those realities. The figures say nothing about the way in which situations are endured and nothing about people's suffering, or about the struggles to be faced.

8. But the NGOs involved, throughout the world, with population groups which are among the most destitute do have this degree of awareness. Through them, the poorest sectors can be enabled to participate. People working in them have taken up the cause of the most destitute, constantly sharing their life and hopes, and thus have a special insight into their condition.

9. A model exists for bringing about the participation of the poorest sectors in the effort to understand extreme poverty. This was drawn up for the report on the subject "Extreme poverty and economic and social need" 1/ compiled for the French Economic and Social Council by Father Joseph Wresinski, who was in constant contact and consultation with families among the poorest in the country. This "Wresinski approach" is currently the basis of fresh efforts to understand and combat poverty at local, national and international levels as well as at the level of European and world forums. The Wresinski report provides the first definition of extreme poverty in terms of human rights.

> "Precariousness is the lack of one or more of all the securities which enable persons and families to assume their basic responsibilities and enjoy their fundamental rights. The resultant insecurity may, to varying degrees, be far-reaching and entail serious, lasting consequences. Most frequently, it leads to extreme poverty when it affects a number of spheres of existence, when it tends to become prolonged and persistent, and when it seriously undermines the chances of regaining one's rights and reassuming one's responsibilities by oneself in the foreseeable future."

Resolution and appeal

The NGO signatories,

Faithful to their mission of bringing to the attention of the United Nations the realities of peoples' existence, and in particular those of the most suffering sectors of mankind,

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1/ "Extreme poverty and economic and social need", (Journal Officiel de la République française, February 1987).

Convinced that peace and human rights cannot be realized unless the international community mobilizes to eradicate poverty, with the participation of the poorest themselves,

1. Request that the study "Human rights and extreme poverty" should be carried out with the genuine participation, from its conception, of persons and families living in extreme poverty;

2. Undertake to continue to bring to a wider audience their knowledge of the realities of living in poverty and their effect on human rights, so as to make it accessible to governmental bodies, public opinion and all defenders of human rights;

3. Request the United Nations to support them in discharging that responsibility and enabling them to promote the participation of the poorest, on an equal footing, in the United Nations;

4. Call, in particular, on the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to ensure that:

(a) The first parties consulted in regard to the study on human rights and extreme poverty are the poorest themselves, through their associative life and their closest observers;

(b) Such consultation with the poorest and their closest observers is based on the "Wresinski approach";

(c) The study makes it possible to explore (i) the effects of extreme poverty on the exercise of all human rights, (ii) the ways in which the poorest themselves can put to effect the experience essential to a better understanding of real-life conditions and to the application of truly effective measures for the eradication of poverty.